DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 513 24 RE 002 345

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TITLE The Relation Between Cloze and Multiple-Choice Test Scores as a Function of Relative Paragraph Difficulty and Grade Level.
INSTITUTION Southwest Regional Educational Lab., Inglewood, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
REPORT NO TR-6
BUREAU NO BR-6-2865
PUB DATE 1 Jul 68
CONTRACT OEC-4-7-062865-3073
NOTE 26p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.40
DESCRIPTORS Analysis of Variance, *Cloze Procedure, Comparative Testing, Grade 5, Grade 8, *Measurement Techniques, *Multiple Choice Tests, Reading Comprehension, Reading Level, Reading Materials, *Reading Research, *Reading Tests, Test Selection, Validity

ABSTRACT

The relationship between cloze and multiple-choice tests as measures of reading comprehension at two grade levels, fifth and eighth, was investigated. The reading passages used in the testing were at difficulty levels either 2 years below, 2 years above, or at the subjects' grade level. The final subject sampling included 708 students from each grade. Each of the 35 fifth-grade classes and 32 eighth-grade classes were randomly assigned to either cloze or multiple-choice tests. The California Achievement Test was given to all subjects before the study began. Independent variables considered were the type of test, the grade level, and the passage difficulty. An overall analysis of results showed the cloze test to be sensitive to grade levels but less sensitive to change in passage difficulty. The two tests overlapped in measuring some parts of comprehension, but the multiple-choice tests measured more. It was concluded that caution should be used when applying cloze test scores as measures of comprehension until detailed analyses show what the cloze procedure is measuring and the grade and difficulty ranges for which it is appropriate. References are included. (NH)

BR 6-2865 TRC
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# THE RELATION BETWEEN CLOZE AND MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST SCORES AS A FUNCTION OF RELATIVE PARAGRAPH DIFFICULTY AND GRADE LEVEL

TR 6 1JULY, 1968

This publication was prepared pursuant to a
contract with the United States Department of
Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education.

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# THE RELATION BETWEEN CLOZE AND MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST SCORES AS A FUNCTION OF RELATIVE PARAGRAPH DIFFICULTY AND GRADE LEVEL

Ludwig Mosberg, Thomas C. Potter and Robert K. Cornell

## INTRODUCTION

During the last fifteen years, cloze procedures of varying form have been used to assess stimulus characteristics of printed materials with adults and children. The cloze test form frequently used in these studies is constructed by removing every fifth or every tenth word from a passage and replacing it by a blank of a standard length. The subject's task is to determine the words which were removed and write them in the appropriate blank. His score is the number of words he replaces which are identical to those deleted. The resulting scores have been considered as indices of passage readability by such authors as Taylor (1953, 1956, 1957) and Bormuth (1962). The validity of this contention is based on the finding that cloze scores rank passages of varying difficulty in the same order as traditional "readability formulas" such as the Dale-Chall (1948).

Other authors have suggested that cloze scores also provide a measure of a subject's comprehension of printed material. In 1959, Rankin suggested that cloze tests be considered a measure of reading comprehension. Jenkinson (1957) reported correlations as high as .82 between cloze test results and objective questions based on the same material with adult subjects.

Recent studies have indicated that cloze test scores are positively related to standardized reading comprehension test scores for elementary

and junior high school subjects. Gallant (1965) reports correlations of .65 to .81 for primary grade subjects. Ruddell (1965) reports correlations of .61 to .72 using fourth grade subjects. Positive relationships have also been reported between cloze test scores and multiple-choice test scores over the same passages. Bormuth (1962, 1967) reports correlations ranging from .45 to .92 using fourth, fifth, and sixth grade subjects.

These studies have used a restricted sample of reading material, characterized by an unspecified or narrow range of passage difficulty, and a relatively small number of Ss. Furthermore, different procedures for constructing cloze tests, different scoring procedures and different criterion measures have been used, making comparisons between studies difficult.

The present study investigated the relationship between cloze and multiple-choice tests at two grade levels (fifth and eighth), with reading passages at difficulty levels either two years below, two years above or at S's grade level. At each grade level and passage difficulty level a relatively large number of reading passages were tested over a sizable subject sample. The multiple-choice tests were taken from a set of published reading exercises and the cloze passages were identical to those used in the multiple-choice tests. To avoid order effects, Ss were matched on the basis of standardized reading achievement test scores: one member of each pair was assigned at random to receive the multiple-choice test while the other member received the identical passage in cloze form.

## METHOD

### MATERIALS

All reading materials were taken from the SRA Rate Builders, which are part of the SRA Reading Laboratory Kits (Parker, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1963, 1964). These Rate Builders consist predominantly of concise non-fiction selections covering a wide range of topics including physical, biological and social sciences, history, human interest, etc. Following each selection were from four to ten multiple-choice questions, the number depending upon the length of the selection and its difficulty. Each selection was assigned a reading difficulty level by SRA based on the SRA Reading formula, sometimes in conjunction with other reading formulae such as the Spache (1953) or Lorge (1944) formulae. Initially 90 passages were selected at random, 15 at each of six difficulty levels, third, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth grade. The length of the passages varied from 75 words for third grade passages to 200 words for tenth grade passages. To make the number of response units more equivalent for all subjects, two third grade passages were administered to bring the total number of words read to 150. The mean number of words for the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth grade selections were 150, 165, 180, 180, 200 respectively. To maintain a constant ratio between cloze deletion and multiple-choice questions as well as to increase the reliability of the multiple-choice

test, additional questions were added to the SRA questions. A mean ratio of three multiple-choice items to eight cloze deletions was maintained. Setting the mean number of questions for the tenth grade passages (200 words) at 15, the mean number of questions for third, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade passages were 10.5, 10.5, 12.4, 13.5 and 13.5 respectively. This meant that between three and five questions were added to each selection. The additional questions were similar in form and style to the SRA questions and used vocabulary which appeared in the text.

The cloze tests were constructed from the same selections used in the multiple-choice tests. A fifteen space blank was substituted for every fifth word. At each difficulty level, 1/5 of the passages began deletions with the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth word of the selection. Passages were randomly assigned to initial deletion conditions.

A pilot study using 100 fifth graders and 100 eighth graders indicated that when the SRA formula was used to determine passage difficulty, there was no difference in fifth graders' performance on the third or fifth grade passages on either the cloze or multiple-choice tests. Similarly, eighth graders performed equally well on sixth and eighth grade passages. To shed light on the lack of differential performance on third vs. fifth and sixth vs. eighth grade passages, the reading difficulty of the passages were re-computed using the Dale-Chall (1948) formula. The Spache (1953) formula was applied to third grade passages because the Dale-Chall formula is known to be insensitive to difficulty of selections appropriate to the early elementary grades. When passage difficulty was thus re-computed, there was no difference between third and fifth grade or sixth and eighth grade passages selected from the SRA materials. The SRA grade placements were generally lower on the fifth and eighth grade material than the Dale-Chall assignments. The SRA formula takes into account the number of syllables per word and sentence length whereas the Dale-Chall and Spache formulae use sentence length and vocabulary difficulty based on frequency counts. Therefore, the Dale-Chall and Spache formulae were used to determine the difficulty level of the SRA passages used in the main study. Reading difficulty grade placements were re-computed for all SRA Rate Builders and a new sample of paragraphs (15 at each of the six grade levels) was chosen randomly for use in the final study.

The pilot study data revealed that the questions added by E were consistently about ten percent more difficult than the SRA questions. It was determined that this difference would not materially change the results of the experiment and the practice of adding questions was again used in the main study.

## PROCEDURE

Each of the 35 fifth grade classes and 32 eighth grade classes was randomly assigned to either the cloze condition or the multiple-choice test condition. Prior to testing, California Achievement Test (CAT)

reading scores were obtained on all Ss. The CAT was administered approximately six months prior to this study. On the basis of the CAT reading scores Ss within each grade level were matched using two criteria: (a) that one S in each pair be in a class assigned to the cloze condition and the other S in a class assigned to the multiple-choice condition; (b) that there be no more than a two month difference in CAT grade equivalence scores for the two Ss. Over 95 percent of the subjects were matched on the basis of identical scores. All Ss for whom a matched S could not be found were eliminated from the study. This resulted in eliminating approximately five percent of the initial sample.

Three independent variables were investigated: (a) Type of test (Cloze or Multiple-Choice); (b) Grade level (fifth or eighth); (c) Passage difficulty (two years above or below grade level or at grade level). The design of the experiment, therefore, was a 2 x 2 x 3 fixed effects factorial design, yielding a total of 12 conditions with 118 Ss per group. Within each grade level, matched pairs were assigned randomly to one of the three passage difficulty levels. Within difficulty levels each matched pair was assigned randomly to one of the 15 selections at that level. The original design called for 10 matched pairs to receive the same selection. However, due to absenteeism, the final sample consisted of between seven and ten subject pairs receiving each passage.

Testing was conducted by four Es, each of whom held an elementary school credential; each was shown how to administer the tests. For both the cloze and multiple-choice tests, the instructions consisted of an explanation of the task and a practice sample which the E and Ss negotiated together (see appendix). For both tests Ss were given 25 minutes to complete the test. The pilot study revealed that 25 minutes was sufficient time for over 95 percent of the Ss to complete either test.

## SUBJECTS

The initial sample consisted of 1038 fifth graders and 984 eighth graders in a Southern California school district. This district is a predominantly lower-middle to upper-middle class community. Due to transfers, absenteeism and inability to match Ss, the final sample consisted of 708 fifth graders and 708 eighth graders.

## RESULTS

Scores on both cloze and multiple-choice (MC) tests were converted to proportion of correct responses in order to make appropriate comparisons. To ensure that the random assignment of Ss to the three levels of passage difficulty did not produce significant differences between groups on reading ability, an analysis of variance was performed for CAT scores for the three difficulty-level samples at each grade level. No reliable differences were obtained. Means are presented in Table 1. Groups within the fifth and within the eighth grades appeared comparable in

Table 1

Comparison of CAT scores as a Function of Grade and Passage Difficulty

| Difficulty Level | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade |
|---|---|---|
| High | 4.731 (1.302)* | 8.136 (1.859) |
| Medium | 4.856 (1.271) | 8.095 (1.933) |
| Low | 4.739 (1.506) | 8.186 (1.940) |
| Mean | 4.775 (1.361) | 8.186 (1.908) |

* Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

terms of reading ability. The mean CAT score for the fifth graders was 4.775 and 8.186 for the eighth graders.

Separate 1-way analyses of variance comparing the SRA MC items with those written by the Es at each grade level and passage difficulty level indicated that in all cases performance on the SRA items was reliably higher than on our own items. This difference of approximately 12 to 15 percent was consistent over groups except for the high difficulty passages for both the fifth and eighth grades, where differences were 30 and 7 percent respectively. The 30 percent difference between scores on the SRA items and our items may reflect an over-estimation on the Es' part of the abilities of Ss at this intermediate grade level. The 7 percent difference for the tenth grade material may reflect a greater facility on the Es' part to construct more appropriate questions as the reading ability of the Ss nears that of the test constructors. The difference in correlation between cloze tests and SRA items and between cloze and our own items was .065. Since the only primary effect of our questions was to reduce the absolute value of the proportion correct, the two sets of items were pooled for all analyses. This procedure had the advantage of reducing ceiling effects on the MC tests and providing more reliable scores.

Table 2 shows the mean proportion correct and the standard deviations for each of the 12 cells of the design. As expected, the mean proportion correct on the MC tests was superior to those on the cloze tests. Second, as difficulty level of the passages increased, scores on both cloze and MC tests decreased. Third, eighth graders showed consistently higher scores than fifth graders on both tests and at all levels of passage difficulty. A 3 x 2 x 2 analysis of variance for independent groups (Table 3) indicated that all main effects were statistically reliable at the .01 level of significance; the Type of Test x Passage Difficulty Level interaction also was statistically significant at the .01 level. This interaction effect is graphically presented in Figure 1. It is evident that the interaction effect is due to the lack of difference between cloze performance at the lowest and medium difficulty levels at each grade level (.321 vs. .318; .405 vs. .394). These results, in combination with the fact that there is a linear decrease in performance over difficulty levels on the MC tests, suggest a lack of sensitivity of the cloze procedure at the lower end of the difficulty dimension.

It should be noted that the overall analysis of variance treated the cloze and MC groups as independent groups even though matched Ss (CAT scores) were assigned to the two test conditions. The correlation between cloze and MC scores for matched Ss (.489) was such that it was felt that treating this variable as a repeated measure was inappropriate. Treating the two test conditions as independent groups is a somewhat conservative test, in the sense that employing a repeated measures design would have decreased the error term and thereby increased the probability of obtaining significance. However, inspection of the data (Figures 2 and 3) revealed that, had a repeated measures design been used, none of

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Proportion Correct as a Function of Type of Test, Grade and Difficulty Level

| Difficulty Level | Cloze | | Mean | Multiple-Choice | | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade | | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade | |
| Low | .321 (.179) | .405 (.127) | .363 (.160) | .746 (.206) | .805 (.157) | .779 (.180) |
| Medium | .318 (.149) | .394 (.133) | .361 (.133) | .635 (.256) | .732 (.177) | .684 (.224) |
| High | .224 (.145) | .317 (.129) | .271 (.143) | .503 (.233) | .644 (.208) | .573 (.232) |
| Mean | .288 (.164) | .372 (.135) | | .628 (.252) | .727 (.193) | |

Table 3

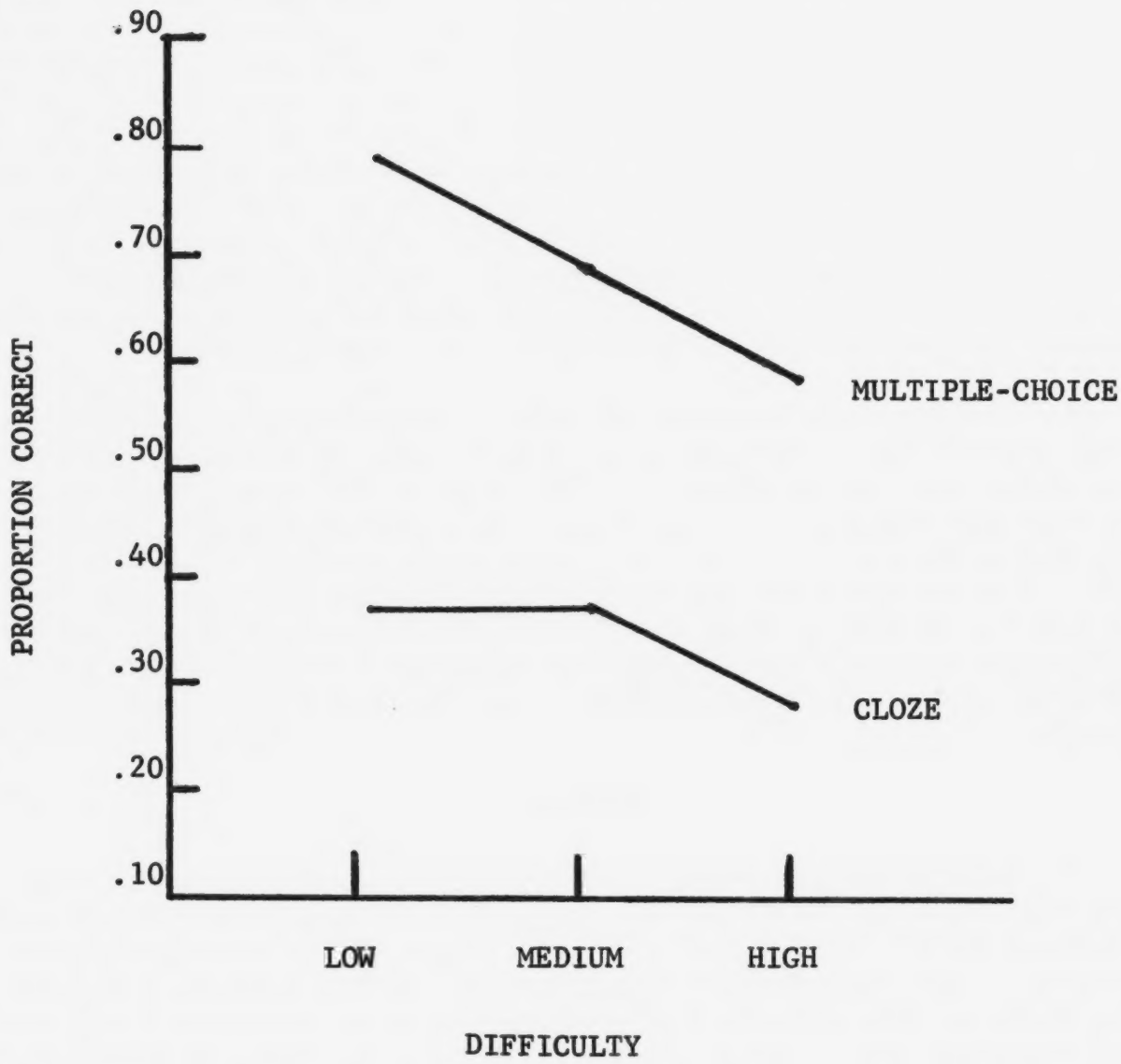
Analysis of Variance of Proportion of Correct Responses

| Source | df | SS | MS | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of Test (T) | 1 | 42.772 | 42.772 | 1326.275** |
| Grade (G) | 1 | 2.979 | 2.979 | 92.386** |
| Passage Difficulty (D) | 2 | 5.298 | 2.649 | 82.145** |
| T x G | 1 | 0.020 | 0.020 | 0.618 |
| T x D | 2 | 0.780 | 0.390 | 12.100** |
| G x D | 2 | 0.126 | 0.063 | 1.951 |
| T x G x D | 2 | 0.796 | 0.398 | 1.234 |
| Error | 1404 | 45.281 | 0.032 | |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Figure 1. Proportion Correct as a Function of Type of Test and Passage Difficulty



the non-significant interactions would have approached statistical significance.

A series of Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were computed for cloze and MC scores and for CAT and cloze and CAT and MC scores (Tables 4 and 5). The correlations were consistently higher for fifth graders than eighth graders. These correlations also show that for the fifth graders the highest correlation is obtained for the easiest material whereas for eighth graders the correlation is lowest for the easiest material. Figure 4 shows linear least-squares best-fits for each of the six experimental conditions, where the MC test score is the criterion measure. Figure 4 shows group 5-L (fifth graders taking the easiest passages) and 8-M (eighth graders taking the medium difficult passages) excepted, that the slopes are parallel within grade levels and are somewhat steeper for the fifth than for the eighth grade.

The correlations between CAT and cloze scores are consistently higher than those correlations between CAT and MC scores (Table 5). This is somewhat surprising since the CAT is primarily a multiple-choice test. A partial explanation of this effect was found in scatterplots of the data, which showed a moderate but noticeable ceiling effect on the MC tests. The correlations are consistently higher for the fifth graders than for the eighth graders and for the fifth graders the highest correlations are obtained for the easiest material, whereas the highest correlations for the eighth graders are obtained for the most difficult material.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the overall analysis of variance indicate that the cloze test is sensitive to grade level but is less sensitive to changes in passage difficulty, at least at the lower end of the difficulty dimension. The correlations suggest that the cloze procedure does, in fact, measure some component of comprehension as measured by MC tests, but it is apparent that a large component of comprehension as measured by MC tests is not accounted for by the cloze procedure. However, it should be noted that the correlations between MC and cloze test scores were calculated on the basis of matched Ss. Insofar as the matching was not perfect, the correlations between the two types of tests should be depressed. One might hypothesize that the true correlations are somewhere between those obtained in this study and those reported by Bormuth (.92) (1967). (Bormuth used the same subjects and material for both tests, which introduced possible order-effects, and more restricted subject and passage samples.)

Although eighth graders performed better than fifth graders on both MC and cloze tests, the correlations at all passage difficulty levels were lower for eighth graders than for fifth graders. The superior performance of eighth graders was most likely a function of their superior ability to follow instructions (both grades received the same instructions) and greater experience in test taking. These same variables may also

Figure 2. Proportion Correct as a Function of Type of Test and Grade Level

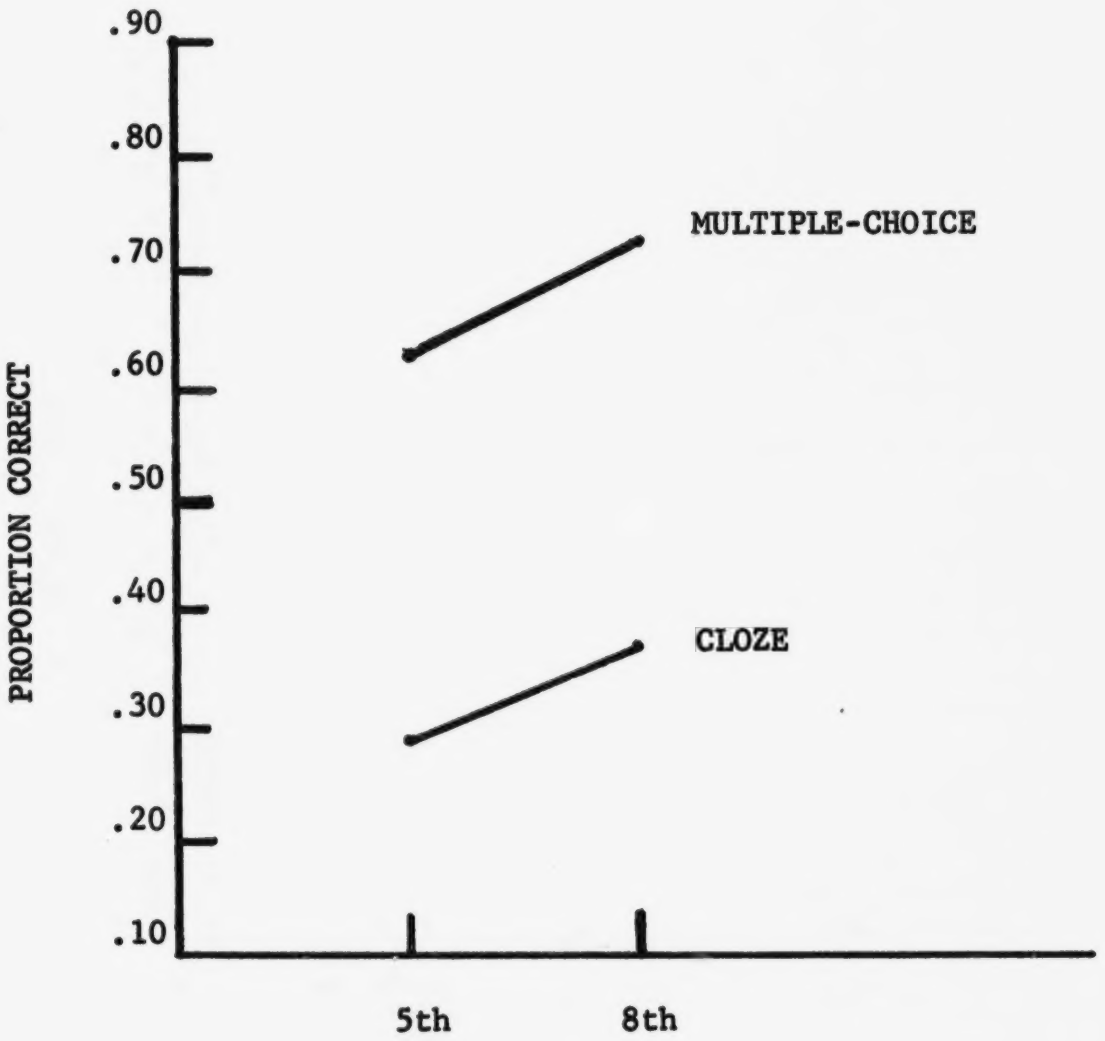


Figure 3. Proportion Correct as a Function of Grade and Passage Difficulty

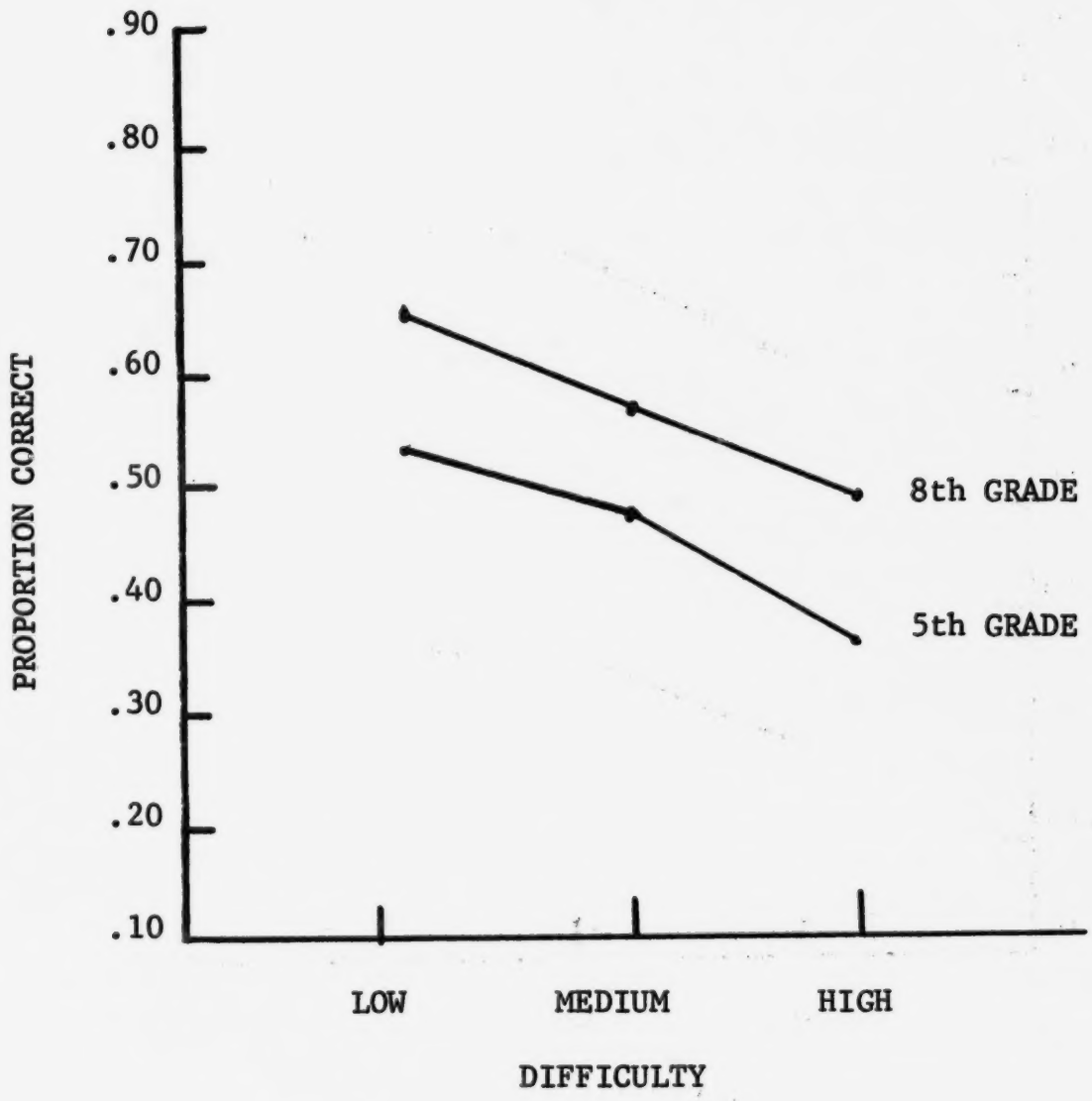


Table 4

Correlations between Cloze and Multiple-Choice Scores

| Difficulty Level | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade |
|---|---|---|
| Low | .649 | .190 |
| Medium | .424 | .367 |
| High | .434 | .247 |
| Overall | .535 | .335 |

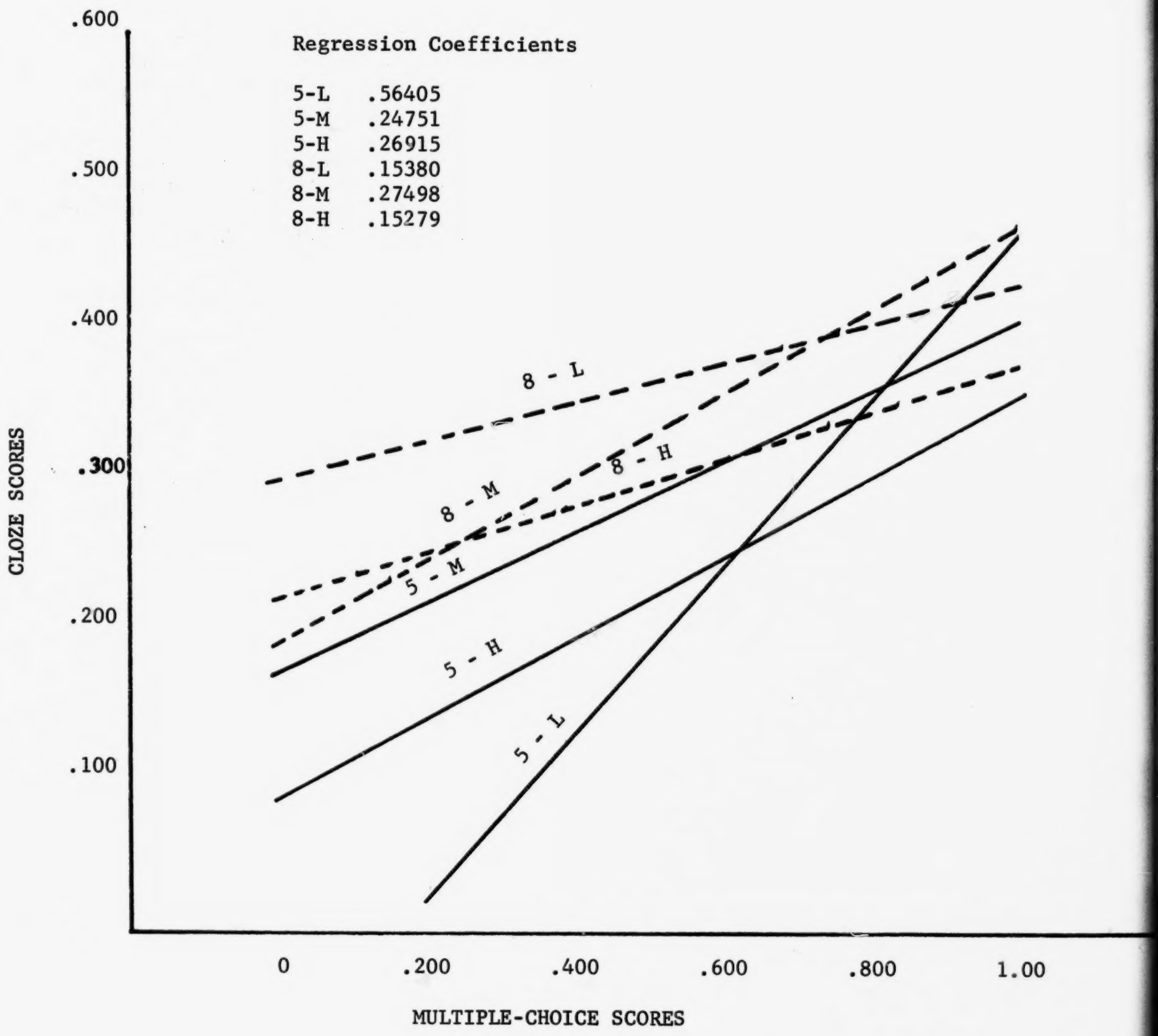
Table 5

Correlations between CAT and Multiple-Choice Scores

and between CAT and Cloze Scores

| Difficulty Level | Multiple-Choice | | Cloze | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade | Fifth Grade | Eighth Grade |
| Low | .691 | .461 | .694 | .510 |
| Medium | .619 | .478 | .646 | .510 |
| High | .560 | .554 | .677 | .601 |
| Overall | .484 | | .561 | |

Figure 4. Best Fit Lines and Regression Coefficients for Each of the Six Experimental Conditions




Note: 5=Fifth grade; 8=Eighth grade; L=Low Passage Difficulty; M=Medium Passage Difficulty; H=High Passage Difficulty.

be responsible for the higher correlations for the fifth graders than eighth graders. Inspection of the scatterplots indicate greater ceiling effects on the MC test for the eighth graders than fifth graders which have the effect of reducing the correlations. The additional finding that the highest correlation for the fifth graders is obtained with the easiest material while the eighth graders show the lowest correlation with the easiest material can be similarly explained. For eighth graders, as passage difficulty increased ceiling effects decreased; hence, the correlation should be depressed for the easiest material.

It may be concluded that one should proceed cautiously when using cloze test scores as measures of comprehension (or predictors of MC test score magnitudes) until a more detailed analysis of what the cloze procedure is measuring and of grade and difficulty ranges at which the cloze procedure is an appropriate measure have been established.

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# APPENDIX

CLOZE TEST DIRECTIONS

Good morning, my name is _____.

Your teacher may have told you that I am going to give you a test.

It is important that you do the best job you can, but, the scores will not go on your school records.

Please clear your desks.

I need four volunteers. (directions to volunteers)

Two of them pass out the tests to the person named so that the name is up.

Two of them hand out the pencils.

Please do not turn the booklet over until I ask you to do so.

If your pencil breaks during the test, raise your hand and I'll give you another.

Please leave the pencil on the desk until we start the test.

(When all of the materials have been handed out, SAY.....)

Now turn over the test booklet. Find the word DIRECTIONS

Read the directions silently while I read them aloud. They say.....

This is a new kind of a test. You will read some short paragraphs.

Words have been left out of the paragraphs and blank spaces were put where the words were removed.

Your job will be to decide what word was left out of each space and write that word in the space. Reading the other words in the sentence will help you decide what the missing word should be.

It will help you in taking the test if you will remember these things:

1. Write only one word in each blank.
2. Fill every blank. Don't be afraid to guess.

3. Skip hard blanks and come back to them later.
4. Wrong spelling will not count against you if we can tell what word you meant.
5. Most of the blanks will be filled with ordinary words, but a few will be
   numbers like . . . . . 3,427 or $12 or 1954
   contractions like. . . . . can't or weren't
   abbreviations like . . . . . Mrs. or U.S.A.
6. Write neatly.

Let's try a couple of samples to see how it words.

Look at Sample (A) _____ Birthday.

A word is missing from the sentence. What do you think the missing word is? #(Happy) Write the word in the blank.

What was the clue word? #(Birthday)

Now...Look at Sample (B) _____ are you going?

What do you think the missing word is? #(Where) Write it in the blank.

What clues did you use? #(question mark - going)

Now look at Sample (C).....(The Beaver)

Indians call beavers the "little men of the woods." But they *aren't* really so very little. *Most* beavers grow to be *three* or four feet long *and* weigh from 30 to *40* pounds. These "little men *of* the woods" are busy *most* of the time. That *is* why we say, "He's *busy* as a beaver."

Sometimes a paragraph like this one has clues that will help you fill in the blanks at the beginning that were hard for you. If you have trouble with a blank skip it and come back to it later.

Remember! Put only one word in each blank.

ANSWERS: 1) aren't 2) most 3) three 4) and 5) 40 6) of 7) most
8) is 9) busy

When you have filled in all of the blanks, read the story again to see if it makes sense. When you have finished, look at the answers which are written upside down at the bottom of the page. Change your wrong answers to the correct ones and read the passage again!

(Teacher reads the paragraph inserting the correct words)

Pencils down.

Now are there any questions about how you take the test? #During the test I will not be able to answer any questions.

All of these tests are different. Some will take longer than others.

After you finish close your test booklet, put it face down on the desk.

Then.....Take out a book and read.

Please do not talk while the test is in progress.

You will have plenty of time.

Open the booklet and fold the first page flat on the desk.

You may begin.....

(After 25 minutes say STOP..PENCILS DOWN--Ask the monitors to collect the tests and pencils.)

#Call on children for a response. In some cases a response is indicated in parentheses. If it is given say "yes" or "good". If the response in parentheses is not given say "no" and call on another child. Repeat the question if necessary.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST DIRECTIONS

Good morning, my name is _____.

Your teacher may have told you that I am going to give you a test.

It is important for you to do the best job you can, but, the score will not be put on your school records.

Please clear your desks.

I need four volunteers. (directions to volunteers)

Two of them pass out the tests to the person named so that the name is up.

Two of them hand out the pencils.

Please do not turn the booklet over until I ask you to do so.

If your pencil breaks during the test, raise your hand and I'll give you another.

Please leave the pencil on the desk until we start the test.

(When all of the materials have been handed out, SAY.....)

NOW turn over the test booklet. Find the word DIRECTIONS.

Look at Sample (A) Read the story silently while I read it aloud.

> About two hundred years ago, the first big balloon was made. The man who made the balloon wanted some animals to try it out. He put a sheep, a rooster, and a duck in the balloon and sent the balloon into the air. Soon it came down. The balloon ride had not hurt the animals.

After each story there are unfinished sentences about the story and three or four possible endings. Your job is to decide which of the endings is best and put a circle around the letter in front of that ending.

Sentence number one says.....The first balloon was made

A. last year.
B. 200 years ago.
C. 2000 years ago.
D. 20 years ago.

Put a circle around the letter in front of the ending that you think is best.

You may look back at the story if you need to.

Which letter did you circle? #(B)

Now read the second sentence and circle the letter in front of the best ending.

Which letter did you circle? #(A)

Now...Put your pencils down.

Are there any questions about how you take this test?#

All of these tests are different. Some of them will take longer than others.

When you finish one story, go on to the next.

Be sure that you complete all of the sentences on each page.

You will have plenty of time. When you finish you may go back and check your answers.

When you feel that you have done the best you can, close the booklets and put them face down on the desk.

Then...Take out a book and read...Please do not talk.

Now...Are there any questions?#

Open the first page, fold it flat on the desk.

You may begin.

(At the end of 25 minutes say STOP--PENCILS DOWN--Ask the monitors to collect the tests and the pencils.)

#Call on children for a response. In some cases a response is indicated in parentheses. If it is given say "yes" or "good". If the response in parentheses is not given say "no" and call on another child. Repeat the question if necessary.